

**REPORT - PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING
November 18, 2004**

Project Name and Number: FORERUNNER CHRISTIAN CHURCH (PLN2005-00101)

Applicant: Forerunner Christian Church (formerly Zion Church of Praise), Stanley Wang

Proposal: To consider a Planned District Minor Amendment for modification of approved art work to substitute text in place of an angel figure on the main entry building wall for an existing religious facility.

Recommended Action: Approve based on findings and subject to conditions.

Location: 39600 & 39604 Sundale Drive in the Irvington Planning Area.

APN: 531-28-65

Area: 10.42 acres

Owner: Zion Church of Praise

Agent of Applicant: Stanley Wang

Environmental Review: A Mitigated Negative Declaration was prepared and approved for this project.

Existing General Plan: Low Density Residential - 5-7 dwelling units per acre

Existing Zoning: P-2003-154

Existing Land Use: Religious facility; Day Care facility

Public Hearing Notice: Public hearing notification is applicable. 147 notices were mailed to owners and occupants of property within a minimum radius of 300 feet from the site on the following streets: Sundale Drive, Bliss Court, Bruning Street, Nelson Street, Wheeler Drive, Sloan Street, Reed Court, Coco Palm Drive, and Cody Court. The notices to owners and occupants were mailed on November 5, 2004. A Public Hearing Notice was delivered to The Argus newspaper on November 2, 2004 to be published by November 4, 2004.

Executive Summary: The proposed Planned District Minor Amendment is to allow for modification of approved art to include text (in place of an angel figure) on the building wall near the main entry for a recently constructed religious facility. The Forerunner Christian Church (formerly Zion Church of Praise) is a new building that includes a sanctuary, chapel, and bookstore that was rezoned to Planned District in the summer of 2003. The site is the former Conrad Noll School. The applicant proposed the modification to the approved art as construction on the building ended.

Background and Previous Actions: The project site is 10.42 acres and located in the Irvington Planning Area on a former elementary school site. The Conrad Noll School was used for many years as one of the Fremont Adult School campuses but was sold by the Fremont Unified School District as surplus property.

The project site is generally located between Sundale Drive and Noll Park on Logan Drive to the northeast. Adjoining the site to the north is the Hetch Hetchy water line and single family detached residences. To the west, across Sundale Drive, are single family detached residences. Southeasterly of the site is an existing concrete channel (Alameda County Flood Control and Water Conservation District, Zone 5, Line C). Single family detached residences are located on the other side of the channel.

The Forerunner Christian Church (formerly Zion Church of Praise) is located on a site that was rezoned to Planned District in the summer of 2003. The sanctuary building is approximately 33,600 square feet in size. The entitlements for the site also included six residential units for teachers and staff, and two student dormitory buildings (22 bedrooms). The church building includes the main worship space, chapel, bookstore, and office and accessory spaces. The design provides seating for approximately 580 people in the main worship space. On Sundays the chapel is used for religious instruction of youths (thirteen years and older). During the remainder of the week the chapel is used for smaller prayer meetings. The church building is located 170 feet from Sundale Drive. The existing Noll classrooms are used for religious instruction ("Sunday School") for children under the age of thirteen. The existing school buildings were retained for possible future use as a training center for pastors and missionaries. Three existing tenants (a Headstart program, Footprint Christian Preschool, and Bay Community Service Adult Daycare) continue in the former school buildings.

Project Description: The original architectural approvals included the use of religious symbolism and art on the exterior of the building. The original proposal was to decorate the walls on either side of the main entry with bas-relief angels with a metallic gold finish. The angels are fabricated off-site from a foam material with a resin and then fiberglass coating. The angels are then attached with steel brackets to the building. The design also incorporates recessed crucifix pattern, gold in color, to the upper façade of the building.

The applicant now proposes to revise the design to only have one angel to the left of the entry and a biblical quotation (e.g. text) to the right of the entry. The quotation would be in both English and Chinese languages. The Chinese would use font resembling Chinese calligraphy in letters approximately 10 to 18 inches in height. The English letters are four inches in height. In total, the proposed Chinese and English text would cover a gross area of approximately six hundred (600) square feet. The angel the text is replacing would have covered a smaller area at the same location. Both types of letters would have an aluminum surface painted blue. The letters are not internally illuminated.

The applicant also originally proposed a painted rainbow mural to the right of the secondary entrance facing Sundale Drive. At the time of the original approval, the mural or a third angel was under review by the applicant. The applicant later decided not to have either the painted rainbow mural or a third angel at the Sundale Drive secondary entrance.

General Plan Conformance: The General Plan land use designation for the project site is Low Density Residential - 5-7 dwelling units per acre. The following General Plan goals and policies are applicable to the proposed project.

Goal H 1:	Conservation and enhancement of existing residential neighborhoods
Policy LU 1.1	Schools, Childcare Centers, Public and Semi-Public Facilities (e.g., churches) and Nursing Care facilities. These uses may be allowed, although conditions may be established to limit the impacts of these uses on residents.

The above land use policy does allow the Forerunner Christian Church and its range of uses under the residential land use designation. The proposed development was designed to limit impacts on the surrounding neighborhood and is subject to the conditions of approval of the Planned District. The religious facility is in conformance with the General Plan.

Zoning Regulations: The property is zoned Planned District P-2003-154. The proposed amendment asks for approval of revisions to the approved art on the exterior of the sanctuary building. The applicant now proposes to modify the art at the entry of the building to consist of a metallic gold bas-relief angel with a trumpet left of the door and a Biblical quotation from Revelations in both Chinese and English to the right of the door. Staff's original concern with the proposal is that text on a building, regardless of the use as a business, public agency, or institution, is typically considered a sign.

The zoning ordinance limits the overall amount of signage allowed for Institutional uses, such as a church, to two signs (one on the building and one free standing sign). There are modifications allowed to the sign limitations through a Planned Sign Program. The Forerunner Christian Church has an approved Planned Sign Program that increased the signage allowed because of the large size of the site and the different functions on the site. The amount of signage was also increased to accommodate the bilingual nature of the congregation. The proposed Biblical quotation text, if reviewed as a sign, totals approximately 600 square feet in area and substantially exceeds the intent of the sign regulations. The Zoning Ordinance definition of a sign is as follows:

Sec. 8-2192. Signs, definitions relating to.

(a) *"Sign" shall mean any writing (including letter, word or numeral), pictorial presentation (including illustration), decoration (including any material or color forming an integral part of other sign elements or used to differentiate such decoration from its background), emblem (including device, symbol or trademark), flag (including banner, balloon or pennant), or any other device, figure, logo or similar character that:*

(1) Is located and maintained as a freestanding structure or any part of a structure, or located and maintained on a building or other structure or device by being placed, installed, attached, affixed, fastened, pasted, posted, painted, printed, nailed, tacked or in any other manner thereon or thereto; and

(2) Is used to announce, direct attention to, identify or advertise; and

(3) Is visible from outside any building or structure.

The proposed text does meet part 1 and 3 of the above definition. However, the proposed text may not meet part 2 of the sign definition. The Biblical quotation is half of a larger design that includes the angel. The applicant, in the enclosed statement, describes the design as follows: "...it was meant to be a symmetrical design, the scriptures are a naturally flow from the angel. The scriptures are the words that were spoken when the angel sounded his trumpet. Without the scriptures on the other side of the wall, the design will lose its meaning." The letter also states "Furthermore, this whole design of angel and scriptures is consistent to the belief and faith of our congregation." Clearly the angel and scriptures are meant to address the people arriving and entering the church. Many places of worship share very common patterns of design including exterior art or decoration that reflects the spiritual practice taking place inside and a defined entry or progression into the special/sacred space. The art of many religions has included text. Some examples are Islamic calligraphy; illuminated manuscripts such as the Book of Kells; Tibetan prayer flags; and combinations of scripture and murals/icons/ mosaics. The proposed entry design of both angel and text may be considered as art reflecting the religious beliefs of the congregation. Staff recommends that the Planning Commission determine that the proposed text is not simply a sign as defined in part 2 of the above ordinance, that is, as writing identifying or advertising the church.

Environmental Analysis: An Initial Study and Draft Mitigated Negative Declaration, was previously prepared and approved for the Planned District P-2003-154. There is no evidence the proposed change in architectural and art design would have any potential for adverse effect on wildlife resources and no new impacts will result from this amendment.

Enclosures: Exhibit "A" (Front elevation and details of proposed quotation)
Informational - Applicant letter
Informational - Examples of religious art including text.

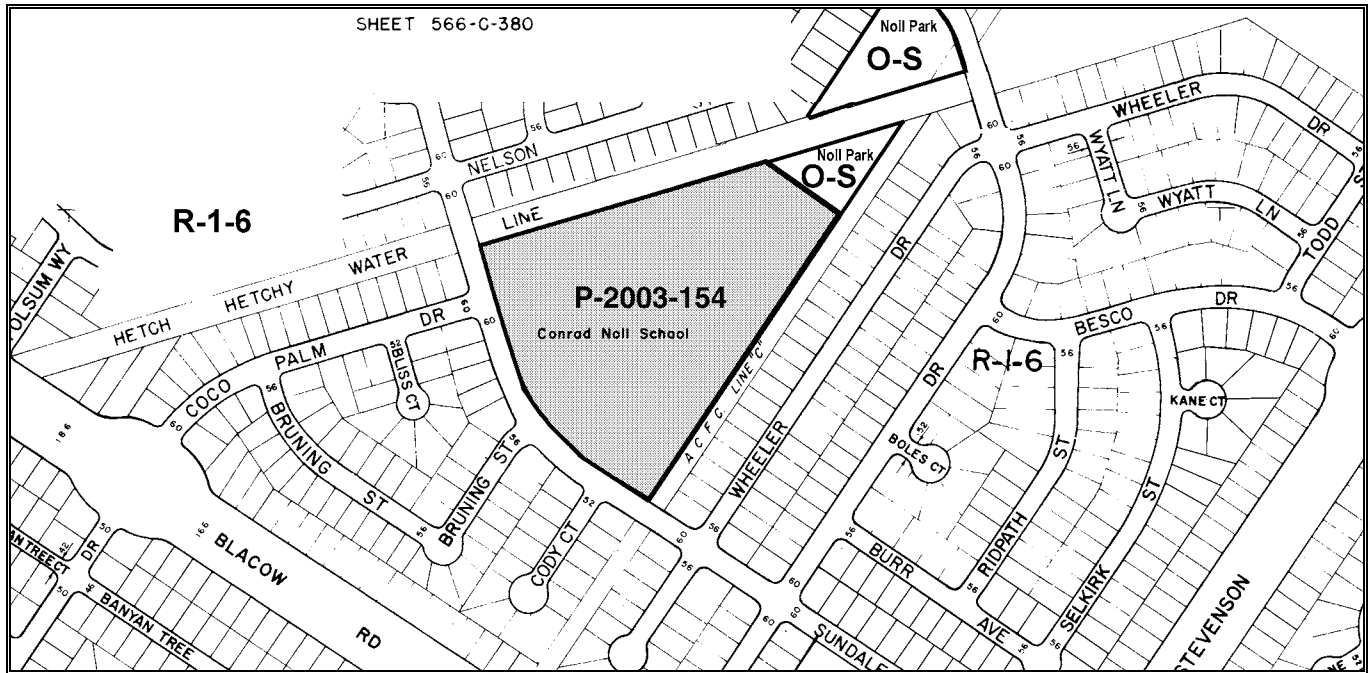
Exhibits: Exhibit "A" (Front elevation and details of proposed quotation)

Recommended Actions:

1. Hold public hearing.
2. Find the previous initial study and Mitigated Negative Declaration for the Planned District P-2003-154 has evaluated the potential impacts that could cause an adverse effect, either individually or cumulatively, on wildlife resources and find that there is no evidence the project would have any potential for adverse effect on wildlife resources.
3. Find that the previous Mitigated Negative Declaration adopted for the Planned District P-2003-154 considered all impacts related to the project and that no new impacts will result from this amendment.

4. Find PLN2005-00101 is in conformance with the relevant provisions contained in the City's existing General Plan. These provisions include the designations, goals and policies set forth in the General Plan's Land Use and Housing Chapters as enumerated within the staff report.
5. Find PLN2005-00101 Planned District minor amendment per Exhibit "A", to modify exterior art on the sanctuary building to include both one (1) bas-relief angel and text, as proposed, does not meet the definition of a sign.
6. Approve PLN 2005-00101 Planned District minor amendment as shown on Exhibit "A".

Existing Zoning
Shaded area represents the Project Site



Existing General Plan

